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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PARM](#) [MARR](#) [MASS](#) [KU](#)
SUBJECT: KUWAIT WANTS GREATER CLARITY ON IRAQ DRAW-DOWN
REQUIREMENTS; SIGNALS DESIRE FOR SUBSTANTIALLY SMALLER
FUTURE U.S. MILITARY FOOTPRINT

REF: A. KUWAIT 107
[1](#)B. 2009 KUWAIT 1036
[1](#)C. 2009 KUWAIT 1153
[1](#)D. KUWAIT 0029
[1](#)E. KUWAIT 0009

Classified By: Political Counselor Pete O'Donohue for reasons 1.4 b and
d

Summary

[1](#)1. (S/NF) Kuwait's new military leadership -- likely with tacit support at the political level -- has increasingly made clear over recent weeks that, with the Iraq war receding into the past and the Iraqi government increasingly capable (and solvent), the large US military presence here is becoming burdensome. Discussions at the January 24-26 Joint Military Commission (JMC) in Washington highlighted the GOK's sense that the US military in Kuwait has become a "heavy guest" and that the time has come to re-assess and re-shape our footprint and Kuwait's financial support for it. GOK representatives at the JMC specifically requested a visit by CENTCOM planners by mid-April to share with the GOK CENTCOM's expectations of what the US military footprint during and after the Iraqi drawdown will entail. With a new and energetic GOK military leadership now in place, Embassy believes it is imperative that the interagency respond to this request quickly and share with the GOK at least the broad outlines (a 75 percent solution) of what it desires from Kuwait in the area of logistical support both for Iraq withdrawal and longer term operations. In doing so, military planners should be aware that Kuwait is no longer prepared to offer the US carte blanche in support of OIF and other regional security activities; it will, instead, be focused on downsizing and shaping the US military presence in a way that emphasizes the long-term defense of Kuwait -- and returns the defense relationship closer to the pre-OIF Intrinsic Action footprint. Kuwait's political and military leadership has made clear that it has little enthusiasm for supporting US military activities in other theaters, including AFPAK. While the GOK is not preparing to push us out the door, it is signaling that it desires a smaller and more Kuwait-focused defense relationship. In preparing to brief the GOK, we should be prepared to offer Kuwait a fairly comprehensive idea of future needs. If the USG determines that it cannot contemplate a significant reduction in our footprint over the next few years or that Kuwaiti logistical support for our operations in AFPAK is essential to US interests, we must be prepared to make a strong case to senior GOK leadership, recognizing that will be a hard sell. Removal of some bilateral irritants may help such a discussion be more

successful. End summary.

¶2. (S/NF) At the January 24-26 JMC the GOK requested a visit, before April 10, by a CENTCOM planning team to discuss Iraq drawdown and the future of the US military footprint in Kuwait. Post provides the following assessment of the political/military challenges and issues that will need to be addressed in any presentation to this key Gulf ally. (Note: While the Kuwaiti political leadership has not yet spoken definitively on some of these issues, being content for the time being to leave these matters in mil-mil channels, we believe that the general thrust of what we are hearing from the new Kuwaiti military hierarchy (led at the Chief of Staff level by a well-connected member of the ruling Al Sabah family) likely reflects the general policy views and goals further up the chain. End Note.)

Briefing the Iraqi Drawdown Plan

¶3. (S/NF) Discussions at the JMC brought to the fore a message that the GOK has increasingly attempted to convey over the past year -- that the US military in Kuwait is becoming "a heavy guest." GOK participants at the JMC requested a visit by CENTCOM planners to share with both GOK senior political and military leadership a comprehensive vision of what the USG anticipates from Kuwait by way of logistical support during and following the drawdown from Iraq. It is understood that, with Iraqi elections scheduled for March and subsequent conditions in Iraq still unknown, it will be difficult for CENTCOM planners to provide a complete drawdown scenario, but Embassy

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believes that it would be very useful if the planners' brief to the GOK could cover the broad parameters of our drawdown plan and lay out specific requests for continued support. (Note: The GOK has indicated it would be happy to receive a "75 percent" accurate plan. End note.) The GOK needs to know what our specific intentions are and how these plans will impact Kuwaiti facilities and material, financial and personnel resources; they need to have this information, if not in fine detail, then at least in its general parameters.

Drawdown of Kuwait?

¶4. (S/NF) Increasingly, GOK interlocutors have expressed the view that the presence of the "heavy guest" -- no longer needed to counter Iraqi aggression -- now risks the undesirable effect of provoking Iran. (Note: Kuwaiti concerns in this regard are also manifested in their failure to date to approve use of a medium wave 600,000 watt IBB radio transmitter for beaming Radio FARDA into Iran. End note.) This meme has featured prominently in the local media following US press accounts of USG plans to deploy additional Patriot batteries to Kuwait (see ref A) -- deployments for which formal approval had not yet been requested of the GoK. With the Iraqi threat receding, much of the Kuwaiti political and military leadership may be anxious to see the US military presence -- now spread across ten bases -- reduced to something along the lines of our pre-2003 presence, i.e. enough to respond to Kuwaiti defense needs, but not so much that Kuwait will be perceived as a potential launching pad for USG aggressive operations in other theaters. That Kuwaiti Ministry of Defense (KMOD) Director of Operations Major General Abdulrahman Al-Othman asked for a list of planned US facility closures and a timeline to achieve them in his Opening JMC remarks is indicative of where the professional military is on this issue, and also reflects the attitudes of the new Chief of Staff, LTG Ahmad Al-Khalid Al Sabah, an influential ruling family member. (Note: While the GoK, and particularly the Kuwaiti military which must share its facilities with the U.S., may perceive us to be a "heavy guest," the reality is that the U.S. military presence here, while large, is all but invisible to average Kuwaitis

given that US forces are deployed in remote locations and for the most part do not circulate outside the wire. In terms of benefit, the U.S. military estimates the direct annual economic impact of the U.S. military on the Kuwaiti economy at \$6.2 billion. End note).

Iraq Should Pay for Ongoing OIF Costs

15. (S/NF) The GoK has made clear that it is less and less inclined to pick up the cost for USG military operations not specifically intended for the defense of Kuwait. Kuwait has also suggested that Iraq now has both the wealth and the capacity to contribute more to its own security and that, with the war in Iraq now an event of the past and reconstruction there now well under way, Iraq is increasingly in a position to pick up more of the financial burden entailed in supporting OIF that has heretofore been assumed by Kuwait. In the event that USG planners contemplate long-term Iraq-related scenarios involving Kuwait -- such as the posting of a Quick Reaction Force (QRF) in Kuwait to respond to security crises in Iraq -- these should be noted in the CENTCOM planners' brief; planners should also be prepared for stiff push-back on some of these plans.

GoK not inclined to Transfer OIF support to OEF

16. (S/NF) General Al-Othman and his subordinates used the JMC to pointedly inquire into the amount of support currently going to AFGPAK from Kuwait. The GoK political leadership has also firmly conveyed to Embassy its view that the growing conflict in Afghanistan and Pakistan does not present a perceived threat to Kuwait, and that support for US military engagement in the AFGPAK theater should not emanate from or otherwise involve Kuwait. Given these views, it will be essential for USG planners involved in AFGPAK operations to factor Kuwait's lack of enthusiasm for such operations into their calculation and, if a Kuwaiti logistics role is deemed essential to US interests, to build a strong argument for such involvement. In all events, USG planners should not take for granted a smooth transition from OIF to OEF, at

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least insofar as Kuwaiti logistical support is involved. If Kuwaiti support for OEF is deemed vital, we should be prepared to craft a top-level diplomatic engagement strategy to make the case -- and be prepared for push-back.

"Clarifying the DCA"

17. (S/NF) Though often caveated as a desire to "clarify" the terms of the Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA) -- an agreement under which the US military has enjoyed considerable freedom of action since 1991 -- the GoK clearly wishes to re-interpret the applicability of many of its provisions -- and perhaps renegotiate the text, in pursuit of an outcome that will be much less favorable to US military flexibility and focused more clearly on support for what Kuwait sees as necessary for its defense. One senior Kuwaiti military officer at the JMC, speaking frankly, observed that under the "regional security" rubric of the DCA, "you could put a man on the moon and charge us for that." US civilian and military planners clearly need to begin thinking now about the shape of a descoped DCA when it comes up for renewal in 2011, with the likely outcome that we will be operating in a more restrictive environment.

Bilateral Irritants

18. (S/NF) We should acknowledge up front that for Kuwait -- on military matters as all else -- the bottom-line is the bottom line. A nation of traders and savvy investors is looking to the future with the desire to reduce outlays for

support of the U.S. military here, and to shrink and refocus what is present and supported here to more clearly meet Kuwait's perceived security needs. As we gear up to negotiate our future military footprint with the GOK, however, it is useful to bear in mind certain irritants that, if corrected, could help improve -- at least marginally -- the climate for our bilateral dialogue. One of these is the sense among many in the Kuwaiti military that their U.S. counterparts take Kuwaiti support for granted and, thus, fail to engage them. As General Al-Othman complained at the JMC, "senior US officials rarely stop to engage with Kuwaiti leadership" (including senior US generals). Absent dialogue and regular engagement, the sense of many Kuwaitis that they are being imposed upon has begun to fester; some serious and frank senior dialogue, if sustained, could help alleviate this complaint. A second ongoing Kuwaiti grievance which, while not yet in the public eye, has been a source of irritation to the Kuwaiti military, is US failure, thus far, to fulfill a perceived promise to remove depleted uranium (DU) residues from a Kuwaiti training site.

¶9. (S/NF) As mentioned above, a recent New York Times story "outing" US-Kuwaiti plans to site additional Patriot missile units in Kuwait caught the GOK off guard and fueled public speculation that the US is using Kuwaiti territory to prepare for hostilities with Iran -- and raising public anxiety that in a conflict between Iran and Israel or the U.S., Kuwait will be caught in the cross-fire. An ongoing dispute with Kuwait Ports Authority over the assessment of fees on military cargoes -- some of which are clearly not intended for the security of Kuwait -- has also irritated the Kuwaiti military. Many Kuwaitis also feel that their country's generous support for OIF has not resulted in progress on a number of important Kuwait-Iraq issues, such as official Iraqi acceptance of the UNSCR 833 border demarcation, the removal of encroaching farmers, and a return of Kuwaiti archives and the missing, and these failures have led some to wonder about the value of the OIF "blank check military policy" engagement -- particularly when they perceive U.S. officials as waffling on UNSCR 833 by talking about "boundary compromises" or "mutually agreed technical adjustments to boundaries." Finally, we cannot ignore the ongoing legal case against Agility, the Kuwaiti-owned logistics company, whose stock is owned by many of Kuwait's top leaders. As a result of the suit brought by the USG, Agility has lost over one billion USD in market capitalization and the dented stock portfolios of a number of senior Kuwaitis can contribute nothing positive to future discussion on mil-mil cooperation and support.

Comment

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¶10. (S/NF) Despite a clear Kuwaiti preference for a speedy downsizing of US forces in Kuwait commensurate with and parallel to our drawdown in Iraq, we believe that Kuwait desires to maintain a robust long-term military partnership with the United States. The present DCA, signed just after the 1991 liberation of Kuwait, is highly favorable towards USG interests; pending "clarifications" of some of its tenets may mean a less favorable product, but not an unfavorable one. In this context, we must be prepared to make specific requests of the GoK that demonstrate a commitment to the security of the country. Despite Kuwaiti reservations about maintaining a large footprint here, should it be deemed imperative that the GoK provide AFPAC support given the signals of reluctance we have already received in this regard, the interagency should be prepared to engage at the highest political levels here to make that case -- and even then we must flag that there is no guarantee that such an approach will achieve all our desired ends. End comment.

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